Religion and Resistance: Examining the Role of Religion in Irregular Warfare

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ABSTRACT

The US counter-insurgency manual (FM 3-24) has been criticised by several theorists for a lack of attention paid to the issue of religion. For example, critics of the manual indicate that religion is mentioned only a handful of times, and merely in-passing or as a secondary factor within a broader appreciation of the cultural context of the operating environment. The superficial treatment of religion in counter-insurgency doctrine, and a trend of dismissing the grievances of religiously-inspired antagonists as illegitimate, serves to illustrate a general lack of appreciation for the mingling of the religious and the political that exists outside of Western society. In other words, there is an overall lack of recognition of, and appreciation for, the ways in which religion underlies social, cultural, political, and economic discourse and action, and, more specifically, the role of religion in conflict. The aim of this paper is two-fold: (1) it will critically examine the treatment of religion and religious concepts in US and Canadian counter-insurgency doctrine; and (2) by drawing upon Religious Studies scholars, and by comparing historical and contemporary examples of religious conflict between states and non-state actors, it will argue that spiritual insurgencies are forms of violent new religious movements. The objective of this paper is to encourage the re-thinking of the problem-space and a reassessment of how we classify and treat religious conflict in doctrine and engage religious antagonists in the contemporary operating environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduced in 2007, the joint US Army and Marine Corps counter-insurgency manual (FM 3-24) has been criticised by several theorists for a lack of attention paid to the role of religion in contemporary irregular conflict [1]. For example, critics of the manual indicate that religion is mentioned only a handful of times, and that when religion is identified or discussed, it is done so merely in-passing or as part of a broader appreciation of the cultural context of the operating environment. In response to these critics, David Kilcullen, one of the primary architects of US counter-insurgency doctrine and a special advisor for counter-insurgency to the Secretary of State, defends the manual, asserting that critics misunderstand both the nature of current conflicts and the purpose of military doctrine, further noting that the critics have fallen for the "propaganda from the *munafiquun,*"[1] who "pose as defenders of the faith while simultaneously perverting it [2]." Although Kilcullen does note that almost all "historical insurgencies have a strong religious dimension," he dismisses the idea of insurgencies as being fundamentally religious in nature (i.e. a spiritual insurgency), and suggests that religion has been co-opted by insurgents as a convenient way to manipulate the local population and a cynical justification for acts of political violence and terrorism [3, 4].[2] Religion, rather than being recognized as a root-cause of conflict, is considered to be a feature of the social environment that is exploited and manipulated by the leadership of an insurgency to justify and excuse extreme forms of violence. The theme that religion is merely a tool of political convenience, and a backdrop to secular-political conflict, not only appears in Kilcullen's works, but also cuts across both the US and Canadian counter-insurgency doctrines.

This superficial treatment of spiritual insurgency, and the trend of dismissing the grievances of religious antagonists as inherently illegitimate, serves to illustrate the general lack of appreciation for, and recognition of, the mingling of religious and political realities that exists outside of Western (i.e. secular) society. Certainly, this lack of understanding can lead to serious set-backs and unintended outcomes, such as the instigation and maintenance of the incredibly violent and bloody sectarian conflict in post-Saddam Iraq and the failure of Western states to predict and stop acts of violence by religious extremists. It is precisely these shortcomings, and potential for grave and disastrous outcomes, which necessitates an examination of the role of religion in maintaining and informing irregular conflict and a modification of how religion is addressed in counter-insurgency doctrine.

The aim of this paper is two-fold: (1) it will outline the (mis)treatment of religion in US and Canadian counter-insurgency doctrine; and (2) by drawing upon the works of Religious Studies scholars and by comparing historical and contemporary examples of religious conflict between states and non-state actors,[3] it will argue that spiritual

[1] Meaning *hypocrite*, the derogatory term is from the *Surat Al-Munafiqun*, the 63 sura (or chapter) of the Qur'an.

[2] The argument that Kilcullen neglects religion in his understanding of contemporary insurgency seems to be at odds with Kilcullen's theory of global Islamic insurgency, which contends that non-state Islamist groups are attempting to destroy the established socio-political order through terrorism. However, Kilcullen's theory focuses on applying systems-theory to the global insurgency, and highlighting the political nature of Islamist insurgency, and neglects the religious context of the conflict. In other words, Kilcullen considers the religious dimension of conflict merely to be a distraction, and sees conflict as a political affair. In fact, Kilcullen questions the idea of religious insurgencies (i.e. conflict defined by their religious dimension), arguing that the insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan are not particularly religious, or no more religious than the societies the insurgents are fighting against.

[3] I intend to compare examples of *traditional* conceptions of violent new religious movements (i.e. cults) and spiritual insurgencies. Examples of traditional forms of violent new religious movements include, but are not limited to, the

insurgencies are forms of violent new religious movements.[4] By outlining the failure of counter-insurgency doctrine to adequately address the issue of religion in contemporary irregular conflict, and by arguing that spiritual insurgencies are forms of violent new religious movements (rather than being lumped in with secular forms of resistance), the objective of this paper is to encourage the re-thinking of the problem-space and a reassessment of how we classify and treat religious conflict in doctrine and engage religious antagonists in the operating environment.[5]

THE (MIS)TREATMENT OF RELIGION

In 2007, the US military, under the stewardship of Lt. General David H. Petraeus (Commander, US Army) and prompted by sectarian violence and continued resistance to US occupation in Iraq, released a joint Army / Marine Corps country-insurgency field manual. As noted in the forward by Lt. General Petraeus and Lt. General James F. Amos (Deputy Commander, US Marine Corp), the manual was meant to "fill a doctrinal gap," as the US Army and Marines have been without a counter-insurgency specific field manual for more than 20 years [5]. The Canadian Army followed the development of counter-insurgency in the US military closely, and issued its own (similar) doctrine later in 2007. The development of counter-insurgency doctrine for the US Army and Marine Corps has been followed with the release of the US government counter-insurgency guide in early 2009 [6]. The new US guide to counter-insurgency, which was spearheaded by the US Department of State and represents a whole-of-government approach to counter-insurgency, is a strategic-level document that takes into consideration civilian and military efforts to address the root causes of insurgency. David Kilcullen,[6] who serves as special advisor for counter-insurgency to the Secretary of State as well as Senior Counterinsurgency Adviser, Multi-National Force – Iraq, played a key role in the development of the US Army / Marine Corps field manual and the US government counter-insurgency guide. In fact, Kilcullen, owing to his level of involvement and influence, can be considered one of the primary architects of contemporary US counter-insurgency theory.

Although considered by many military theorists to be a great leap forward for the US military, the doctrine has been criticised for a number of shortcomings, in particular for the emphasis placed on classical counter-insurgency strategy (e.g. David Galula and Robert Thompson)[7] and traditional revolutionary theory (i.e. Marxist-Leninist, Maoist, and Guevara's *foco*[8] revolutionary theories), as well as the lack of treatment of religion

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Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, Solar Temple, Heaven's Gate, and the Christian Identity Movement. These groups are generally accepted, in both mainstream media and the scientific literature, as violent new religious movements.

[4] By 'forms' I mean that spiritual insurgencies are more advanced types of violent new religious movements. The distinguishing feature of spiritual insurgencies is that they have achieved critical mass in terms of popular appeal and organizational gravitas, such as structural depth and quality, the acquisition of resources (weapons, etc), and the shared-intent to engage in collective violence to achieve the sacred end-state.

[5] Due to space limitations, this study will compare spiritual insurgencies with traditional violent new religious movements on a cursory level. It is acknowledged that a deeper, more detailed analysis and comparison of religious themes in contemporary irregular conflict is necessary in future examinations.

[6] David Kilcullen is a former officer in the Australian Army, having left the military in 2005 at the rank of Lt. Colonel.

[7] David Galula (1919-1967) was a French military officer and has been credited with the developing modern counter-insurgency theory. Galula based his counter-insurgent theory on his personal experiences during the Algerian War. Sir Robert Grainger Ker Thompson (1916-1992) was a British military officer and counter-insurgency expert. For a short period of time, Thompson served as the head of the British Advisory Mission to Vietnam.

[8] Based on his experiences during the revolution in Cuba, Che Guevara developed *foco revolutionary theory*, which holds that a small, elite (i.e. vanguard) of highly-dedicated militants can create, through military struggle rather than political parties, the conditions for revolution rather than waiting for those revolutionary conditions to naturally develop.

as a unique motivator of contemporary irregular conflict. The primary concern of the critics is that, by over-generalising the various forms of insurgency, and by developing secular theories of violence (based largely on the communist revolutions of the twentieth century), contemporary counter-insurgency doctrine ignores the distinctive and unique qualities of conflict defined, framed, and driven by religion [7, 8]. Ralph Peters notes that the new counter-insurgency doctrine is designed for "fairy-tale conflicts" and is inappropriate for the "religion-fuelled, ethnically-driven hyper-violence" of contemporary society [9]. Peters criticises the doctrine, arguing that it ignores faith-inspired violence, such as acts of terrorism committed by religious extremists or the *jihad* to re-establish the Islamic caliphate, in favour of secular-political insurgencies and treats all insurgencies as purely secular-political affairs. Similarly, Frank G. Hoffman argues that the new doctrine generally overlooks the influence of religion on behaviour, noting:

> Some see religion as a proxy for an ideology; others simply dismiss it as an irrational factor. Still others discount its influence or note that some insurgent leaders fraudulently high-jack religion with their message. Our own secular orientation often clouds the importance of this factor in modern warfare [10].

Although Hoffman is quick to indicate that, while the new doctrine mentions religion (specifically, religious identity and the appearance of religious extremism), it does not discuss or provide detail on how religion, or appeals to the sacred, influences or alters how insurgency is manifested in the contemporary operating environment. Similarly, Liora Danan and Alice Hunt note that "it remains unclear how personnel should take religion into account during operations" and that the doctrine does not provide an understanding of religious themes [11]. In other words, religion is treated in a superficial manner and the role of religion in conflict and, more specifically, acts of violence, is not discussed in any meaningful way.

This superficial treatment of religion, and the reliance upon traditional revolutionary theory, is apparent in the categorisation of insurgencies in US and Canadian doctrine. For example, in the Canadian Army counter-insurgency operations doctrine, insurgencies are broken-down into five general types; that of, (1) *anarchist insurgencies,* which seek to destroy the existing system of governance, (2) *egalitarian insurgencies,* which involve mass-uprising and seek the re-distribution of wealth, (3) *traditionalist insurgencies,* which seek the re-establishment of traditional value or belief systems (including traditional religion), (4) *separatist insurgencies*, which are wars of regional liberation or succession, and (5) *reformist insurgencies,* which are conflicts that fuse political, economic, and social reform with the struggle for autonomy [12]. Although religion is identified as a sub-type of traditionalist insurgency, the unique characteristics of religious traditionalism (versus secular forms of ethno-cultural traditionalism), are not discussed. The issue is that religion is lumped-in with other forms of resistance, which suggest that there is little or no difference between religious and secular forms of conflict.

While the US doctrine does not categorize insurgency in the same manner, it does note that insurgency has evolved over the last century, and that there are three general forms of insurgency. For example, the US doctrine notes that, before World War I, insurgencies were highly localised, conservative movements, generally concerned with

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In contrast to Marxist revolutionary theory, foco theory posits that a revolution can be initiated and maintained by the rural peasantry.

maintaining the status quo through the defending of "hearth, home, monarchies, and traditional religion," whereas the post World War II era was characterised by insurgencies based on the revolutionary ideologies of nationalism or communism [13]. In contrast, the contemporary period is characterised by a new kind of revolutionary insurgency that is based on extremist forms of ethnic or religious identity that "seeks to impose global revolutionary change [14]." Like that of its Canadian counterpart, the US doctrine does not dedicate a separate category for, or discuss in detail, spiritual insurgency.

While US doctrine mentions religious extremism as an emergent form of revolutionary insurgency, and provides Al Qaeda as an example of this new form of global resistance, it does not discuss the role of religion in framing violent collective action.[9] Neither the US, nor the Canadian, doctrine identifies religious violence as being qualitatively or existentially different from secular-political violence. Mark Juergensmeyer argues that, unlike secular-political violence, religious violence is an act of *ritual performance*, concerned more with symbolic value than strategic calculation:

> [R]eligion does make a difference. Some of these differences are readily apparent – the transcendent moralism with which such acts are justified … and the ritual intensity with which they are committed. Other differences are more profound and go to the very heart of religion. The familiar images of struggle and transformation – concepts of cosmic war – have been employed in this-worldly social struggles. When these cosmic battles are conceived as occurring on the human plane, they result in real acts of violence [15].

The quantitative differences, such as the enduring nature of religious conflict, are similarly not discussed. Most contemporary conventional political-conflicts can be measured within the life of the participants and, comparatively, come to a quick conclusion, whereas religious struggles often simmer and persist for generations. Juergensmeyer notes that there is no need to "compromise one's goals in a struggle that has been waged in divine time and with the promise of heaven's reward [16]." Mircea Eliade asserts that, while non-religious actors live in ordinary time, religious actors, by participating in sacred events (e.g. a holy war), live in sacred time [17]. For religious actors, the actual passage of linear-time is of no consequence, as the end-state will be realised only when God wills it.

Religion in the US and Canadian doctrine is treated as an identity mechanism or means of recruitment rather than a framework for action. In other words, US and Canadian counter-insurgency doctrine compartmentalises and devalues the role of religion, separating it out from the political and relegating it to a position of muted consequence (i.e. a simple vehicle for persuasion and recruitment rather than a root-cause of violence). Merely recognising that insurgent movements have, or share, certain religious beliefs is not enough; it is critical to consider how religion drives and frames conflict.[10] Countering the appeal of spiritual insurgency requires a deep understanding of the motivations behind religious conflict. As asserted by Peters, it is only by acknowledging

[9] In particular, doctrine does not discuss or illustrate how religion directs and sanctifies violence or the unique characteristics of religious violence.

[10] It is important to note that spiritual insurgency is not limited to any one religious tradition, such as Islam or Christianity; rather, it exists across religious traditions.

the “integrity and intensity of our enemies’ faith that we can begin to understand him, and then combat him effectively [18].”

The failure to understand and appreciate the religious dimension of political action is not without consequence. For example, the failure of the US government to anticipate and respond to the Shiite-led revolution in Iran contributed to the deepening of the sectarian divide in the Middle East (in fact, the West dismissed revolutionary Islamic ideology as the most effective means of mobilizing mass resistance in Iran, believing that secular-nationalism would prevail), and the underestimation of the potential for sectarian violence in post-Soviet Afghanistan and a post-Saddam Iraq has led to an enormous loss of civilian life as well as the destruction of culturally significant sites and religious artefacts.

> Although policy and military leaders are now aware of the pervasive sectarian divisions in the area, they remain at a loss about how to respond. The 2006 Sunni bombing of a Shi’a shrine in Samarrah further weakened American credibility among the Shi’a and Sunni groups, both of whom increasingly take matters into their own hands. The United States continues to try to contain conflict without addressing the differences that lead to bloodshed. Meanwhile, insights into both the motivations and inspirational ability of key religious leaders … have been insufficient [19].

Other missteps, such as the offending of the religious sensibilities of the indigenous population through the accidental destruction or misuse of sacred sites (e.g. non-believers occupying holy sites), help to deepen or maintain hostility.

Spiritual Insurgency

The idea of insurgency as being fundamentally religious in nature is not new. In fact, Steven Metz identified *spiritual insurgency* as a ‘relatively’ new form of insurgency in the post-Cold War era [20]. In his highly perceptive and prescient article entitled, “The Future of Insurgency,” Metz argues that spiritual insurgency is the “evolutionary descendent of traditional revolution,” essentially building onto, and then replacing, traditional Marxist-based revolutions. Although Metz notes that spiritual insurgency is not entirely new (i.e. there was usually a spiritual component to traditional revolutions, including messianic tendencies and apocalyptic perspectives), he asserts that the difference between traditional (i.e. secular) Marxist and spiritual insurgencies is that spiritual insurgencies are guided by an explicit search for meaning and justice on part of the insurgents.[11] In other words, spiritual insurgents are seeking a sense of fulfilment and meaning rather than the satisfaction of basic material needs, such as access to food or the amelioration of economic deprivation.

> The key to post-cold war insurgency is its psychological component. The greatest shortcoming of Third World states (including most of the former Soviet bloc) is their inability to meet the psychological needs of their populations, especially a sense of meaning during the stressful periods of rapid social change associated

[11] Metz argued that *commercial insurgency* developed alongside that of spiritual insurgency. In contrast to spiritual insurgency, which emphasizes meaning and justice, commercial insurgency is characterized by a pursuit of wealth and power.

with development. This shortcoming will generate frustration and discontent which can be used by insurgent strategists [21].

Metz further notes that the essence of spiritual insurgency is the rejection of a particular regime or social order, including the social, economic, and political systems associated with that regime. Metz also argues that the rise of spiritual insurgency was a direct result of the collapse of the unifying ideologies that characterised the Cold War. The failure of these unifying ideologies (communism and capitalism, but also various forms of pan-nationalism) created a spiritual-political vacuum, which was filled by nativist ideologies based on either ethnicity or religion.

Although Metz can be credited with being one of the first contemporary military theorists to conceptualise spiritually insurgency as a separate category of insurgency (rather than lumping it in with secular forms of resistance), his conceptualisation remains largely undeveloped. It does, however, serve as an excellent jumping-off point for further analysis and discussion. It is, therefore, my intent to augment Metz's conceptualisation of spiritual insurgency, and show that spiritual insurgencies are not secular-political constructs with a (superficial) religious dimension, but rather violent new religious movements, guided by a religious worldview and political-theology, that seek totalising social transformation (in particular, the annihilation of perceived religious adversaries) through the use of divinely-sanctioned violence.

WORLDVIEW, IDEOLOGY, AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Before proceeding with the comparison of spiritual insurgencies with violent new religious movements, two points require clarification. The first concerns the use of the term *worldview*. A worldview is not a religion; however, it is informed by religion. Whereas a religion is a personal or institutionalised set of beliefs, attitudes, and practices about the sacred, a worldview is a formal or informal system of beliefs that provides a conception of human existence, in particular a person's relationship with the world and to the sacred. In essence, a worldview identifies one's position in the world in relation to others (i.e. those who do not belong to the community of believers) and the sacred. A worldview can also be shared in that a community of believers holds the same or similar conception of human existence, but on a collective or macro level (i.e. a shared system of beliefs that defines the group's position in relation to other groups and the sacred). For example, the National Socialist worldview holds that white-nationalists (i.e. Aryans) are the pinnacle of the human race and that, through a covenant with the divine, will engage in a holy war to conquer and enslave subservient races. Worldviews are critical, as they provide a reference-point for interpreting and interacting with the world vis-à-vis the sacred.

In comparison, ideology is a system of ideas, theories, or themes that comprise a socio-political program of a specific group or community; it is a framework for socio-political action to achieve a particular end-state. In Western society, ideology is typically thought of as a purely secular framework or programme for action; it is not usually concerned with the sacred or one's relationship with the sacred (because a separation exists between political and religious realities) [22].

However, it is important to note that religions can also be ideologies; that is, they can respond to social and political concerns. For example, religious sects are ideologically-

framed new religious movements (developed in response to perceived shortcomings of an existing religion) that have the explicit goal of propagating and maintaining specific (usually non-traditional) socio-political positions. Religious-ideologies differ from secular-ideologies in that they prescribe a programme of action based on the sacred (i.e. they are theologically informed, as action is based on divine law). For example, religious fundamentalist movements, such as (but not limited to) nativist or millenarian movements, raise issues and concerns about society and they promote specific political remedies based on divine prescriptions. In his analysis of fundamentalist movements in the United States and Iran, Martin Riesebrodt argues that an ideology defines "interests and values," but also perceptions of the past and expectations for the future, and that, depending upon theological or political position, can be seen as either "religious-theological traditionalism" or as "radical rightwing movements [23]." Similarly, Jahanbakhsh asserts that the *fiqh* (sharia) – based understanding of religion and politics served as a "legitimising ideology of clerical rule" that shaped and directed political discourse and behaviour in post-revolution Iran [24]. Religion and politics are fused, and religious and political institutions serve as one – there is no separation. In a fiqh-based understanding of Islam, religion is seen as the foundation for social, economic, and political behaviour; it is a maximalist understanding of religion (versus the religious minimalism typical of the secular-West).

In his book, *The Stillborn God,* Mark Lilla notes that, in most civilisations, human beings appeal to the sacred when reflecting upon political questions or concerns, and that their thinking (i.e. thinking about religious solutions to socio-political problems) takes the form of *political theology* [25]. Rather than being a universal phenomenon, Lilla argues that the great (but artificial) separation between religion and politics is not only a relatively recent development (in the last four centuries), but is limited to Christian society (i.e. the West). Lilla further asserts that much of world does not separate political-philosophy from cosmology and theology.[12] In other words, this separation is a distinctive feature of modern Christian society.[13]

Religious-ideology – or more appropriately, political-theology – is the mingling of social and political realities with the sacred; it is the nexus between the sacred, man, and the world, and serves as a prescription for action based on man's understanding of, and relationship to, the sacred. Arguing that religion and politics are "isomorphic," James K. Wellman notes:

> [R]eligion and politics are structurally linked; symbolic and social boundaries are always related. No act is only symbolic but arises out of a complex latticework of cultural and political layers of persuasion, power and force [26].

[12] Mark Lilla notes of the separation between politics and religion: "We [the West] are separated from out long theological tradition of political thought by a revolution in western thinking that began roughly four centuries ago …. We live in a world created by the intellectual rebellion against political theology in the West … [and] we are no longer in the habit of connecting our political discourse to theological and cosmological questions; and we no longer recognize revelation as politically authoritative." See Lilla, M. (2007). *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West.* New York: Alfred A Knoff.

[13] It is acknowledged that pockets of political theology exist in the modern West. For example, the growth of liberal political theology and the linking of God and country in WWI and the support offered by various theologians to National Socialism. The English Revolution is another example of a conflict in which theology fused with politics to generate violent conflict.

Therefore, artificial boundaries and clear distinctions do not exist between the religious and the political in political theology; the result is a *totalistic* pattern of thinking and behaving based on the sacred.

RE-THINKING SPIRITUAL INSURGENCY

The purpose of this section is to re-think the role of religion in violent resistance and how we categorise spiritual insurgencies. By utilising the works of several Religious Studies scholars, I intend to demonstrate that spiritual insurgencies are, in fact, forms of violent new religious movements. Specifically, this section will examine nine themes held in common between spiritual insurgencies and violent new religious movements: (1) That participants believe they have exclusive access to the sacred and sacred knowledge (gnosis); (2) That participants see the outside world as both illegitimate and corrupt; (3) That the world is dualistic in nature, divided into the sacred and the profane, good and evil; (4) That salvation can only be achieved through the elimination of evil and corrupting influences, and that violence is necessary to (symbolically) cleanse the world; (5) That violence is divinely-willed and sanctioned (i.e. God deems the use of violence, manifested as a holy war, as necessary); (6) That the new social order (i.e. re-structured society) is modelled on the sacred, usually in the form of an idealised and mythical past; (7) That movements are informed and maintained by a central prophetic character; (8) That participants see themselves as agents of the sacred and soldiers of God, and (9) That the end-state is the implementation of divine-law (i.e. a politically theology), which guides all thinking and behaviour. Based on these common themes, I submit that spiritual insurgencies should be categorised and treated as forms of violent new religious movements in counter-insurgency doctrine.

It is important to note that I am not arguing that spiritual insurgencies represent the emergence of a formal church (in so far as a church is traditionally conceived of in the West – that is, either as a building of worship or a highly-defined and formal organization of worshippers), such as 'The Church of Al Qaeda,' rather I am arguing that spiritual insurgencies represent theologically-informed and divinely-sanctioned activities, conducted in a relatively coordinated fashion and working towards a sacred goal or objective. I do not regard spiritual insurgents as a strict or *formal community of worshippers* (i.e. a small and intimate group gathering on a regular basis to pray), but rather a loose and largely *informal community of believers*, all working towards the same sacred end-state (i.e. the established of a utopian society based on the sacred) and usually under the guidance or direction of a charismatic and prophetic leader. It is where *zeitgeist* achieves critical-mass and becomes collective action.

(Violent) New Religious Movements

At their most basic, new religious movements (or NRMs) are relatively small, often informal, and loosely organized religious groups or networks "whose beliefs, values, and practices are at variance" with mainstream society or with traditional forms, or conceptions, of religion [27]. New religious movements are relatively novel and nascent manifestations of religion that develop outside mainstream society (in particular, existing religious institutions), usually in response to specific socio-political issues. While some new religious movements possess highly developed theological frameworks and

systems of belief and ritual, others are relatively immature and under-developed. Other new religious movements, such as Aum Shinrikyo, synthesise a melange of beliefs and rituals from existing (even antagonistic) religions to create a novel belief system that is purpose-built to suits the needs of the membership. Moreover, while some new religious movements are benign (e.g. the Hare Krishnas, Wicca), others are hostile, aggressive, and violent, and can more accurately be described as *violent new religious movements* (e.g. Aum Shinrikyo, the Branch Davidians, the Christian Identity Movement, etc). This study is particularly interested in comparing spiritual insurgencies to violent new religious movements.

Mainstream society, however, typically uses the term *cult* to describe an emergent religion, in particular counter-cultural movements, and this term has assumed pejorative connotations [28]. The term cult has become a label associated with deviancy, violence, and self-destructiveness, and is often used by mainstream society (in particular, law enforcement and the anti-cult movement) to dehumanise, demean, and vilify the members of unconventional or uncommon religious movements. Cult also implies a close-knit, intimate group, existing on the margins of society.

> It is a term widely used to refer to religious groups regarded as aberrant and dangerous. It is a convenient four-letter word to put into headlines. Today, *cult* is a put-down, an insult conveying that a group is despised by the social mainstream. *Cult* has become a word that expresses prejudice against a religious group …. *Cult* represents an oversimplified and bigoted stereotype that is applied to numerous religions [29].

Moreover, Jean Rosenfeld argues:

> New religious movements are frequently derided as “cults,” whose “bizarre” behaviour and “rambling” discourse are indecipherable, but in fact, their theologies are usually systematic and coherent [30].

Rather than cult, many scholars prefer to use the term *emergent religion* or new religious movement, or any other term that attempts to neutralise the negative connotation associated with unconventional religious practices and beliefs or atypical moral causes framed by the sacred.

> [Scholars] have sought to replace the very word ‘cult,’ with all its pejorative connotations, with such terms as ‘new religions,’ ‘marginalised religious groups,’ ‘emergent religions,’ and ‘new religious movements [31].’

Similarly, Wessinger refrains from using the term cult to identify new religious movements. Wessinger argues that the term cult is too simplistic and emotional, a term that evokes fear (in the public) and, therefore, does not permit for objective analysis.

> I suggest that avoiding labelling unconventional groups “cults” and treating the believers as religious people worthy of respect will go far in reducing the sense of antagonism between catastrophic millennial groups and society …. Because the word cult has become so pejorative, I recommend people avoid using this term and instead recognise that these groups are religions [32].

Scholars also warn against labelling all new religious movements as deviant and destructive. Wessinger notes that comparative studies of religion indicate that beliefs and practices vary, and that what is "regarded as strange in one religion is normative in another [33]." Similarly, Dawson argues against "lumping" new religions together:

> Despite some similarities, these new religions have different conceptions of our origins, development and future. They propose different explanations of our existential plight, and they offer different programmes to alleviate our woes. They mobilise and organise different resources, in different ways, with different immediate and distant consequences. They may even be responding to different situations, needs, desires, and constituencies [34].

This study will employ the term *violent new religious movements* to identify religious practices or a community of believers that exist on the margins of society and use, or are willing to use, violence to achieve a particular sacred end-state.

Spiritual Insurgencies as Forms of Violent New Religious Movements

Although a number of scholars provide a typology or categorisation of violent new religious movements, the most appropriate categories for the study of spiritual insurgencies are provided by Roy Wallis and Catherine Wessinger.[14]

In his analysis, Wallis identifies three main forms of new religious movements. The first form is *world-rejecting movements*,[15] which possess a dualistic worldview (i.e. separating the world into good and evil, order and chaos, or the sacred and profane) and identifies, and rejects, the modern world and the current social order as evil, corrupt, and illegitimate. This rejection may take the form of violent action, such as acts of terrorism or mass-suicide, or it may take the form of isolationism and social withdrawal. The second form is that of *world-affirming movements,* which view the current social order in a less contemptuous fashion, rejects the idea of dualism, and can be understood as self-help or therapeutic-based movements. The third form is that of *world-accommodating movements*, which focus on the inner religious life and the goal of discovering inner spiritual purity. It should be noted that, while Wallis' categories are not rigid and some characteristics may cut-across categorical boundaries, only world-rejecting movements can be understood as violent new religious movements (i.e. world-affirming and world-accommodating are generally benign manifestations of new religious movements).

Wessinger identifies three main categories of violent new religious movements: (1) *assaulted*, (2) *fragile*, and (3) *revolutionary*.[16] First, assaulted millennial groups are those considered by society to be dangerous and are usually under surveillance (and possibly, the target of criminal investigation and prosecution) by law enforcement agencies. The Branch Davidians, a sect of the Seventh Day Adventists, are an example of assaulted

[14] Wallis' and Wessinger's categories are the most appropriate for this as they are complementary systems of classification that focus on the role of violence and dualism.

[15] World-rejecting movements are a form of violent new religious movement; and, of Wallis' categories, this form is the most relevant to the study.

[16] Wessinger refers to this group of violent new religious movements as catastrophic millennial groups; that is, groups that expect a cataclysmic transition to salvation and violently reject the dominant social order.

millennial groups.[17] Second, fragile millennial groups are those that suffer from chronic internal stressors, as well as external forces (originating in mainstream society), that endanger its ultimate concern (i.e. the achievement of salvation). Heaven's Gate, the members of which committed mass suicide as the Hale-Bopp comet approached the earth, is an example of a fragile millennial group.[18] Another example is that of Aum Shrinrikyo, which pursued the development of weapons of mass destruction and committed acts of terrorism in response to perceptions of persecution by outsiders.[19] Third, revolutionary millennial groups possess theologies of violence, recognising that only the violent overthrow and total destruction of society will lead to spiritual salvation. The white-nationalist movement, which believes that a *Racial Holy War* (i.e. the complete destruction of the current social order) will usher in a new golden-age for the Aryan race, is an example of a revolutionary millennial movement.[20] It is important to note that Wessinger's categories are not rigid and groups often overlap categories.[21]

According to Wallis' framework, violent new religious movements are characterised by personal, or group-specific, conceptions of the sacred that identify the divine as a supernatural-entity that belongs solely to the group (i.e. outsiders do not have access to the sacred). Central to Wallis' framework is the idea that violent new religious movements regard the prevailing social order as illegitimate and removed from the sacred:

> Mankind has lost touch with God and spiritual things, and, in pursuit of purely material interests, has succeeded in creating a polluted environment … a world filled with conflict, greed, insincerity, and despair [35].

Likewise, Wessinger argues that violent new religious movements are characterised by the belief that they are participating in a divine plan to destroy sources of evil and corruption in society. Under the inviolability and sanctity of the sacred, these groups aim to inject violence into the socio-political environment (which they regard as corrupt and illegitimate); the goal of which is to destroy the basic institutions and governance of society in order to prepare the world for re-birth. In Wessinger's analysis of the Montana Freeman, a US-based Christian-Identity group, she notes that the participants "believe that violent revolution is necessary and divinely ordained in order to establish the millennial kingdom [36]." Similarly, Robbins asserts that violent new religious movements are highly dualistic and "adhere to a vision of the world as divided between absolute evil and absolute good forces," and that this polarity is externalised in terms of the current

[17] Led by David Koresh, the Branch Davidians were involved in a 51 day siege with the Federal Bureau of Investigations in 1993. The siege ended with the complete destruction of the religious compound and the death of 76 members of the sect.

[18] Although the group opposed suicide, more than 38 members of the group committed suicide over a one-day period. Two more members committed suicide within the year of mass suicide. It was determined by the leadership of the group that suicide was the only way the members could leave the earth (via the Hale-Bopp comet) and survive the coming apocalypse. The mass suicide was hurried in order to coincide with the comet's closest orbit of the earth.

[19] The original goal of Aum Shinrikyo was not to commit acts of terrorism to usher in a new world. However, due to the perception that the outside world was conspiring against the group, the group's leaders and members began preparing for revolutionary violence. The progression towards violence was motivated, in large part, by the fragility of the group.

[20] Racial Holy War, or RAHOWA, is the prophesised holy war between white-nationalists and non-whites. In white-nationalist mythology, the destruction of the current social order, through an all-out race war, marks a new era of Aryan supremacy.

[21] For ease of readership, I will use the term violent new religious movements when referring to world-rejecting movements or the various forms of catastrophic millennial groups.

social and political context (i.e. they recognise the outside world as evil and having deviated from God's plan) [37]. Violent new religious movements adhere to a worldview that divides the world into two distinct and mutually exclusive categories of good and evil, and believe that a radical transformation (i.e. violent revolution) to collective salvation is achieved through the elimination of evil.

> As Christian Patriots and believers in a theology called Christian Identity, the Freeman believe they were living in a period of the tribulation, the time of violence leading to Armageddon, the final battle against Satan's agents. This would be followed by the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of God's kingdom [38].

Ellwood notes:

> [Violent new religious] movements need continually to define rigorously the boundaries between themselves and unbelievers, or enemies representing the old order, and to expel or destroy the old order [39].

The dualistic nature of the world, and the notion of the illegitimacy of the current social order and the modern world, is found across spiritual insurgencies. For example, Osama bin Laden framed the conflict between Muslim civilisation and the West as a battle against a mythical monster, one that only divine power could destroy. Likewise, members of Aum Shinrikyo saw themselves as progenitors of the divine truth and as agents of the sacred in mortal conflict with the forces of evil, which included the Jews, Freemasons, and the United States.

This notion of restructuring the contemporary world through violence is not new. For example, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke notes that there was a global rejection of modernity (i.e. the principles of science and secularization) in German National Socialism and that pre-World War II German-*Volkisch* groups (nativist groups that fused the idea of Aryan racial supremacy with Norse mythology) were established as a method of recovering and revitalising the lost esoteric knowledge linking the modern Germanic people to the ancient and sacred forces of nature, blood, and soil.

According to Wallis, members of violent new religious movements not only self-identify as revolutionaries, but also as *agents of the sacred* and, in some cases, prophets or disciples of the divine (i.e. they are not just revolutionaries, but rather *holy revolutionaries* and, in some cases, *martyrs*; sanctioned and guided by the sacred). Ellwood, in his analysis of National Socialism as a violent new religious movement, notes that apocalyptic movements focus on a central prophetic character who becomes the spiritual leader of the movement, and that participants share a sacred knowledge, or gnosis. Ellwood notes that Adolf Hitler was a powerful prophetic figure for National Socialism, and that he, through his speeches, imparted a sacred knowledge on the community of believers. Likewise, Osama bin Laden serves as a prophetic figure for Al Qaeda and Shamil Basayev, who later went by the name Emir Abdallah Shamil Abu-Idris, served the same role in the Chechen insurgency. Another example of a prophetic figurehead includes Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, leader of the Damdami Taksal (a Sikh religious group). Bhindranwale, who was killed in Operation Blue Star, framed the

struggle for a sovereign Sikh homeland (Khalistan) in religious terms, and described Hindus as the enemy of religion.[22]

Wallis notes that violent new religious movements are characterised by a desire to completely destroy the current social order for the new world to emerge. Motivating the participant's commitment to the group is the expectation of end-time, that the revolutionary movement will cleanse the world through violent action and that a new world, one which is inherently connected to and modelled on the sacred, will be created out of the ashes of the old. For Wallis, this new world can take on nearly any form that involves a utopian vision of the world in which the sacred plays a fundamental role. Rosenfeld notes that violent new religious movements anticipate the total transformation of the world [40].[23] For example, the Freeman movement embraces a nativist worldview that draws upon a mythical, utopian vision of the past to reorder the world. Similarly, Al Qaeda uses the idea of the caliphate from classical Islamic history as the basis of, and motivator for, Islamic revival and the establishment of the new pan-Muslim utopia. For Al Qaeda, the caliphate represents the Islamic golden-age as well as its destiny; it is the end-state that can only be achieved through the destruction of the current social order (i.e. the West). Although a Shi'a revolutionary group (as opposed to Al Qaeda, which is a Sunni-based movement), the Palestinian Liberation Organization also employs traditional Islamic concepts, such as jihad and *shahid* (martyr) in framing violent resistance to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (i.e. collectively known as the Palestinian Territories, or *Ha-Shetalhim*). The same is true for Lohamei Herut Israel (Lehi, or *Fighters for Israel*, and also known as *The Stern Gang)*, an underground Zionist organization that led a campaign of terrorism against the British Authority in Palestine, in that they regarded themselves as the 'covenanted people' (referring to their group as the Hebrew army of liberation), guided by God and charged with the responsibility of fighting moral perversion and the revival of Jewish morality. What is important, however, is that the members recognise their participation as a fundamental means of altering the modern world, and that the new world takes on the shape and form of the envisioned (mythological) old, sacred world; in other words, the new world is modelled on the original world created by the gods.

> Since their aim is to recover the world for God, they deny the conventional distinction between the secular and a religious realm; the secular must be restored to its 'original' religious character. [This is] based on a struggle between good and evil, truth and illusion [41].

Spiritual insurgencies, like that of violent new religious movements, empower the group to challenge and ultimately overcome the current social order and reconnect the modern world to the sacred, effectively creating a utopian society under the guidance of the sacred and rebuilding it as it appeared in the original sacred time. Bromely notes:

> This process involves a rejection of and separation from the conventional social order and the heightened internal solidarity and totalism of collectivist organisation. Group life is ritualised extensively as the group constructs itself as a participant in an agonic drama of cosmic proportions and as the group strives for ongoing interaction and integration with transcendental reality [42].

[22] Bhindranwale is recognised as, and given the title of, the *first martyr* for the movement of Khalistan.

[23] Rosenfeld uses the term *revitalisation movements* to identify new religious movements that attempt to renew society through violence.

Similarly, Wessinger notes of the Freeman movement:

> As revolutionary millennialists, the Freeman were part of a contemporary Euro-American nativist millennial movement, or what scholars often call a "revitalisation" movement. A nativist millennial movement consists of individuals who feel oppressed by a foreign colonising government, believing that government is removing the natives from their land and eradicating their traditional way of life. Nativists hope for an elimination of their oppressors and a restoration of their idealised past way of life. The idealised past way of life may be highly embellished, as is the case with Identity Christians, who identify themselves with the biblical Israelites and seek to create a government that enforces God's laws given in the Old Testament [43].

Violent new religious movements, therefore, reject the current social and political (i.e. profane) world, the world understood by the movement as having rejected the sacred, and attempts to reconnect to the sacred by re-creating the world as it once was, or how it is *interpreted* to have been, in its original (i.e. sacred) form.

The goal of spiritual insurgencies is not necessarily to reject the physical world or to deny access to the material world (although some movements, such as the Taliban, are revivalist in a strict sense and reject some aspects of the modern world, such as movie-theatres, music, and televisions),[24] but rather to destroy the elements that are perceived to contaminate the world. For example, the white-nationalist movement seeks to replace capitalism and democracy with a totalitarian, free-enterprise system, as they believe capitalism and democracy to be Jewish inventions designed to subjugate the Aryan race. Similarly, Al Qaeda seeks to eliminate capitalism and democracy (which it considers antithetical to Islam) and replace it with an Islamic caliphate, which is elected by *Shura* (i.e. a theocracy). Likewise, Lehi had the goal of redeeming the land and reviving the Jewish nation, which could only be achieved through the forcible eviction of the British Authority and other foreign influences from Palestine. The goal of spiritual insurgencies, therefore, is to empower the community of believers (i.e. the insurgents) to alter the current socio-political conditions with the objective of creating a new, liveable world based on traditional conceptions of civilisation, which the community of believers rule free from foreign influences. For National Socialism, this meant the elimination of everything Jewish from Aryan society, in particular the aristocracy, as well as the integration of a traditional agrarian lifestyle and Nordic culture alongside that of the modern, commercial national-state. For Al Qaeda and similar pan-Islamic movements, this means the elimination of competing (i.e. non-Islamic) systems of governance, the implementation of sharia law, and the re-establishment of traditional ways of life for the *ummah* (the community of believers). In contrast, Lehi regarded the enemy (in this case, the foreign occupiers and non-Jews in Palestine) as morally perverse, and saw their revolution as a holy redemption of the land and a revival the Jewish nation.

[24] The Basmachi Revolt, which was a Muslim uprising in Uzbekistan between 1916 and 1931, is another example of a revivalist movement. The revolt, initially against the Russian Empire and later Soviet Russia, was a struggle for control of the state as well as an indigenous response to foreign influences, which included the Soviet attempt to promote the unveiling of women and the suppression of religion. In the late 1920s, and in addition to the rural-based rebellion and ongoing violence directed towards the communist government, Uzbekistan witnessed a wave of violence against women, which resulted in more than 2,500 deaths. The attempt by the Soviets to promote the unveiling of women was referred to as *the Hujum,* or the 'attack on the old ways,' and was followed-up by closures of religious institutions, sharia courts, and mosques.

Wallis argues that, although violent new religious movements may engage in hostile behaviour or open-conflict with law enforcement agencies, governments, or other perceived threats (e.g. competing religious or political movements), they serve a basic holistic function by allowing participants to overcome feelings of social deprivation and isolation through sanctioned behaviour (designed to ameliorate the causes of deprivation) and access to esoteric knowledge. Likewise, Robbins asserts that new religious movements (both violent and non-violent forms) offer participants a holistic sense of self, and can provide extended communal relations and social contacts that may help overcome deprivation and isolation. James Davidson Hunter notes that new religious movements "attempt to restore a sense of being by reconstructing or re-imposing institutionally reliable meaning upon existence," and that they result the complex problems experienced by modern humanity [44]. Religion and violence, therefore, can be seen as an "antidote" to humiliation and resentment [45].

Wallis considers deprivation a primary factor in the development of violent new religious movements. For violent new religious movements, continued perception of disadvantage in comparison to other groups or individuals, and the inability to effect change, leads to the conclusion that larger society, via traditional institutions, is either incapable or unwilling to offer a remedy, ultimately resulting in conflict. Reader notes that Aum Shinrikyo, a Japanese violent new religious movement responsible for the gas attacks in Tokyo, became more violent as it began to fail to achieve its objectives [46]. In other words, Aum Shinrikyo developed and reinforced a persecution complex that both justified failure and the use of violence to create change in the world. Reader notes that Aum Shinrikyo represents a case of "progressive catastrophisation of millennialism" – in essence, how a failure to achieve goals and the experience of internal crises, encouraged a complex of persecution and legitimised the use of violence against the outside world (i.e. those perceived to have been persecuting the community of believers). This same progression of marginalisation appears across spiritual insurgencies. For example, Al Qaeda blames "world Jewry and Orientalists" for plotting a global conspiracy against Muslims, which results in continued Islamic marginalisation, and the white-nationalist movement blames the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG) and the United Nations for the continued persecution and economic marginalisation of white people. The violent rejection of the current social order is an expression of that deep-seated collective angst and resentment. Spiritual insurgencies, like that of violent new religious movements, provide a framework that rationalises and sanctifies the rejection of society (through violence), providing a defence against feelings of anxiety at the expense devaluing broader society.

The key feature that distinguishes spiritual insurgencies from *traditional* conceptions of violent new religious movements (i.e. what mainstream society typically refers to as *cults*) as different forms or classes of violent new religious movements is that of *critical mass*.[25] In this analysis, critical mass is the nexus between popular appeal and, what I refer to as, *organizational gravitas,* which includes (but is not limited to) structural depth and quality, the acquisition of resources (such as weapons), and the shared-intent to use collective violence to achieve the sacred end-state. On one level, critical mass is a matter of scale (i.e. having enough members to effectively and consistently engage in a particular activity), and on another level it is a matter of organizational integrity,

[25] Critical mass refers to the existence of a sufficient degree of momentum in a social system such that the momentum becomes self-sustaining or generates increased activity.

capability, and competence. Basically, I identify traditional conceptions of violent new religious movements as relatively small organisations or networks that lack the structure and resources to consistently and effectively engage in 'force projection' (in the form of collective violence) against the prevailing social order. While traditional conceptions of violent new religious movements, such as the Branch Davidians, possess the capability to engage in collective violence, such activities are limited in scope and duration. In other words, they are short, narrow, and limited bursts of violent activity, usually in response to a specific situation or incident (e.g. police investigation) and directed at a particular target (e.g. police, an event, or a building). In contrast, spiritual insurgencies are more advanced or developed forms of violent new religious movements in that they possess the mass appeal and the organizational integrity, capability, and resources necessary to engage in a broad and prolonged campaign of violence against the prevailing social order; in other words, spiritual insurgencies are traditional violent new religious movements that have achieved critical mass.

The problem-space can be viewed as a spectrum of evolution ranging from nascent or rudimentary manifestations of violent new religious movements on one end (i.e. traditional conceptions, such as the Branch Davidians or the Solar Temple) and more advanced or evolved manifestations on the other end (i.e. spiritual insurgencies, such as Al Qaeda, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, or Lehi). Traditional conceptions of violent new religious movements, such as Aum Shinrikyo and the white-nationalist movement, have approached or neared the point of critical mass (i.e. the tipping-point), but failed to evolve into actual spiritual insurgencies due to state interdiction (i.e. police or military intervention) or shortcomings in popular appeal or organizational gravitas. In other words, these traditional conceptions of violent new religious movements had the potential to, but did not, become spiritual insurgencies. I would argue that Aum Shinrikyo likely represents the closest a traditional form of violent new religious movement can come to the tipping-point without actually evolving into a spiritual insurgency (this was due to state intervention). Certainly, based on the Aum Shinrikyo's size and resources (for example, the group purchased military weapons and equipment, developed its own weapons of mass destruction, and had more than 40,000 members worldwide),[26] it is reasonable to conclude that the group had the intent and capability to engage in a prolonged and multi-faceted campaign of violence against the prevailing social order on the same level, and with similar ferocity and destructiveness, as Al Qaeda. It is important to remember that Aum Shinrikyo evolved over a period of 20 years, starting off as a small yoga meditation group and growing to include former members of the military and intelligence services, scientists, lawyers, and other specialists and professionals. While a similar evolution can be noted for Al Qaeda (in that it was not intentionally created to engage in violent activity),[27] Aum Shinrikyo is (typically) regarded by mainstream society as a cult whereas Al Qaeda is identified as a terrorist group. The difference between the two forms of violent new religious movements (i.e. traditional conceptions on one end of the spectrum and spiritual insurgencies on the other) is one of critical mass.

[26] Aum Shinrikyo had properties in several countries, and acquired or developed the capability to manufacture biological and chemical weapons, including sarin, VX, anthrax, and Ebola. Both sarin and VX gas were used in several successful assassinations and murder attempts. The group also attempted to acquire the components necessary to build a nuclear bomb, and also acquired the ability to manufacture military weapons, such as AK47s.

[27] Al Qaeda evolved from *Maktab al-Khadamata*, a Muslim organization founded in 1980 to raise and channel funds to support Afghan mujahidin. The original intention of the group was not to engage in or organize acts of violence (in particular, against Western society), but rather to support the jihad against the Soviets.

SUMMARY

The joint US Army / Marine Corps counter-insurgency field manual and the Canadian counter-insurgent doctrine, while representing great leaps forward, lack an understanding of, and appreciation for, the role of religion in contemporary irregular conflict. Critics of the new counter-insurgency doctrine, most notably Ralph Peters and Frank Hoffman, have indicated that religion is treated not as a causal-root of conflict, but rather as a component of the operating environment that is merely, and cynically, exploited by insurgents for political gain. In other words, religion is treated as a tool of political convenience, and the doctrine does nothing to explain the role of religion in initiating and maintaining violent forms of religion.

In response to these criticisms, I argue that religion plays a central role in informing and maintaining contemporary irregular conflict. By drawing upon the works of Religious Studies scholars, I argue that spiritual insurgencies are forms of violent new religious movements. From this analysis, several common themes have been identified in the worldviews of violent new religious movements and historical and contemporary examples spiritual insurgencies: (1) That participants believe they have exclusive access to the sacred and sacred knowledge (gnosis); (2) That participants see the outside world as both illegitimate and corrupt; (3) That the world is dualistic in nature, divided into the sacred and the profane, good and evil; (4) That salvation can only be achieved through the elimination of evil and corrupting influences, and that violence is necessary to (symbolically) cleanse the world; (5) That violence is divinely-willed and sanctioned (i.e. God deems the use of violence, manifested as a holy war, as necessary); (6) That the new social order (i.e. re-structured society) is modelled on the sacred, usually in the form of an idealised and mythical past; (7) That movements are informed and maintained by a central prophetic character; (8) That participants see themselves as agents of the sacred and soldiers of God, and (9) That the end-state is the implementation of divine-law (i.e. a politically theology), which guides all thinking and behaviour. Based on these common themes, I submit that spiritual insurgencies should be categorised and treated as violent new religious movements in counter-insurgency doctrine.

Does religion make a difference in irregular conflict? The short-answer is: “Yes, it does.” In fact, the influences of religion on irregular conflict, and how militaries respond to religious antagonists, are numerous. First, religion is more than just a factor or tool of political convenience in irregular conflict; it is a driver of conflict. In order to respond to the causal roots of conflict, those roots must first be recognized and then understood. Secondly, how religious violence is manifested is both qualitatively and quantitatively different than secular-political violence. For example, religious violence tends to be symbolic and loaded with meaning. As noted by Mark Juergensmeyer, religious violence is an *act of ritual performance*, less concerned with strategic calculation and more concerned with the symbolic value of a target. The 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon, the Oklahoma City Bombing, as well as the destruction of the giant Buddhas of Bamyan in Hazarajat, Afghanistan, are just a few examples of targets loaded with symbolic value.[28] Religious conflicts also tend to be enduring, lasting for

[28] For Al Qaeda, the World Trade Centre towers and the Pentagon was considered to be the symbolic heart of America and Western capitalism. The Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma was targeted because it housed a number of federal government agencies. Targeting the building was inspired by *The Turner Diaries*, which is a white-nationalist fictional novel that details the coming race war. The building was also targeted on the anniversary of the Waco Siege. The Buddhas of Bamyan had no strategic value in winning the war against the Northern Alliance. However, the Buddhas represented foreign influence and idolatry.

generations, even centuries. Third, if non-kinetic activities or influence operations (e.g. psychological operations) are to be used in response to religious conflict or to target religious antagonists, it is necessary to understand and appreciate how the adversary thinks and behaves. Specifically, it is critical to know how an adversary's thinking and behaviour (i.e. interpreting and interacting) are influenced by worldview, and how political theology directs social, political, and economic behaviour and discourse. It is also necessary to understand the meaning of the religious symbols, myths, rituals, and metaphors used or performed by an adversary, as such cultural artefacts may carry both explicit and implicit meaning. For a message to resonate with a particular audience, we must be able to speak the same dialect as well as the same symbolic language. Lastly, if we expect military plans to be responsive to the contemporary operating environment (specifically, to be able to address the root causes of conflict), those plans must be based on accurate and definitive doctrine. Moreover, a deep understanding of the contemporary operating environment, as well as an accurate portrayal of the adversary, is critical during the red-teaming and assessment of military plans. An understanding of worldview (including the interaction between worldview and political theology), provides insight into how a conflict is defined and framed, which serves as the critical foundation for effective military plans.

I have argued that religion in the US and Canadian doctrine is treated as an identity mechanism or means of recruitment rather than a framework for socio-political action. I have also argued that the mistreatment of religion in the doctrine devalues the role of religion in irregular conflict. Rather than recognising religion as serving a central role in creating and maintaining conflict, US and Canadian doctrine relegates it to a position of muted consequence. Merely recognising that insurgent movements have, or share, certain religious beliefs is not enough; it is critical to consider how religion drives, defines, and frames conflict in the contemporary operating environment. Countering religious violence requires a deep understanding of the motivations behind the conflict, which implies a critical analysis of the worldview and political theology of religious antagonists. But, in order to do that, we must re-think the problem-space and reassess how we classify and treat spiritual insurgencies in doctrine.

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(U) The US counter−insurgency manual (FM 3−24) has been criticised by several theorists for a lack of attention paid to the issue of religion. For example, critics of the manual indicate that religion is mentioned only a handful of times, and merely in−passing or as a secondary factor within a broader appreciation of the cultural context of the operating environment. The superficial treatment of religion in counter−insurgency doctrine, and a trend of dismissing the grievances of religiously−inspired antagonists as illegitimate, serves to illustrate a general lack of appreciation for the mingling of the religious and the political that exists outside of Western society. In other words, there is an overall lack of recognition of, and appreciation for, the ways in which religion underlies social, cultural, political, and economic discourse and action, and, more specifically, the role of religion in conflict. The aim of this paper is two−fold: (1) it will critically examine the treatment of religion and religious concepts in US and Canadian counter−insurgency doctrine; and (2) by drawing upon Religious Studies scholars, and by comparing historical and contemporary examples of religious conflict between states and non−state actors, it will argue that spiritual insurgencies are forms of violent new religious movements. The objective of this paper is to encourage the re−thinking of the problem−space and a reassessment of how we classify and treat religious conflict in doctrine and engage religious antagonists in the contemporary operating environment.

(U) Not available.

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(U) Irregular warfare, IW, religion, counter−insurgency operations, COIN, resistance, ideology, worldview, political theology, influence, doctrine